

Message Text

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO FORD ASSUMPTION OF PRESIDENCY

REF: STATE 174699

1. BEGINNING AUGUST 8 THE WATERGATE CRISIS AND NIXON RESIGNATION MOVED TO THE FRONT PAGES OF HUNGARIAN NEWSPAPERS. IT WAS ONLY ON THE LAST DAY PRIOR TO THE RESIGNATION THAT IT FINALLY BECAME APPARENT TO HUNGARIAN LEADERS AND THE MEDIA THAT IT WAS REALLY GOING TO HAPPEN, AND THAT THE STORY WHICH HAD BEEN DOWNPLAYED FOR 18 MONTHS, WITH MINIMAL INSIDE-PAGE NEWS REPORTS AND VERY OCCASIONAL EDITORIAL COMMENT, WAS ABOUT TO REACH ITS CLIMAX.

2. TO THE END, A REALISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE WATERGATE CRISIS HAS ESCAPED THE HUNGARIAN MEDIA. ALTHOUGH THEY STOPPED BLAMING THE QUOTE ENEMIES OF DETENTE UNQUOTE AS THE SOLE CAUSE OF NIXON'S PROBLEMS ABOUT FOUR MONTHS AGO, THE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE RESIGNATION DURING THE PAST TWO DAYS HAVE ALL STRESSED THE QUOTE POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN VARIOUS CAPITALIST MONOPOLY INTEREST GROUPS UNQUOTE WHICH EITHER RESISTED THE EXCESSIVE

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ACCUMULATION OF POWER IN THE WHITE HOUSE, OR REPRESENTED

DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN PARTY INTERESTS IN THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS, BUT IN ANY CASE REFLECTED ONLY A SHARPENING OF THE ALWAYS PRESENT CONTRADICTIONS AND CRISES OF CAPITALIST SOCIETY.

3. REACTION TO PRESIDENT FORD'S ASSUMPTION OF POWER HAS INCLUDED FOUR ASPECTS: FIRST, EXTENSIVE, FACTUAL FRONTPAGE REPORTING OF EVENTS SINCE THE RESIGNATION FROM BOTH WIRE SERVICES AND WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENTS OF HUNGARIAN MEDIA. ESSENTIALLY ALL ITEMS APPEARING IN OUR WIRELESS FILE WERE REPORTED IN THE NEWSPAPERS. NEXT, AS USUAL, CAME THE MEDIA REACTION TO THE SOVIET PRESS, FOLLOWED BY HUNGARIAN COMMENTARY BY WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENTS AND SECOND-LINE EDITORIAL WRITERS IN SEMI-OFFICIAL MAGYAR HIRLAP, POPULAR-FRONT PAPER MAGYAR NEMZET, AND TRADE UNION DAILY NEPSZAVA. FINALLY, THE OFFICIAL AND AUTHORITATIVE EDITORIAL IN HSWP DAILY NEPSZABADSAG APPEARED IN AUGUST 11 SUNDAY EDITION.

4. SINCE PRESIDENT FORD TOOK THE OATH OF OFFICE MEDIA COVERAGE HAS CONCENTRATED ON HIS ACTIONS AND KNOWN VIEWS REGARDING DETENTE AND RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION. MOST PROMINENTLY FEATURES WAS NEWS OF HIS MESSAGE TO BREZHNEV, PODGORNY'S REPLY, THE FACT THAT SECRETARY KISSINGER WAS ASKED TO REMAIN AND THAT MEETINGS WITH AMBASSADORS WERE HELD TO STRESS CONTINUITY IN FOREIGN POLICY. ALSO STRESSED WERE EARLIER FORD POSITIONS AND STATEMENTS SUPPORTING DETENTE, THE NIXON-BREZHNEV SUMMIT MEETING AND PROGRESS IN THE SALT TALKS.

5. EDITORIAL COMMENT REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED THE STANDARD MOSCOW-INSPIRED LINE THAT THE STRENGTH OF THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES AND THEIR CONSISTENT FOREIGN POLICY HAVE OBLIGED THE U.S. TO ADOPT A FEW YEARS AGO A PRO-DETENTE POLICY OF ITS OWN AND THAT PRESIDENT FORD HAS NO ALTERNATIVE REALISTICALLY SPEAKING BUT TO CONTINUE IT. STRESS WAS ALSO PLACED ON THE BIPARTISAN SUPPORT IN CONGRESS FOR DETENTE AND FOR THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF, EXPRESSING THE OPINION THAT A NUMBER OF PENDING ISSUES AWAITING LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION IN CONGRESS COULD NOW MOVE MORE RAPIDLY. MENTION WAS MADE OF THE FACT THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ALSO SUPPORT DETENTE.

6. COMMENTING ON THE DOMESTIC REPERCUSSIONS OF THE CHANGE,
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MAGYAR NEMZET'S JANOS AVAR SAID THAT QUOTE CALM APPEARS TO BE RETURNING TO WASHINGTON UNQUOTE. IN EVALUATING PRESIDENT FORD'S FUTURE AVAR STATES THAT HE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE TO DEVOTE MUCH MORE TIME TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROBLEMS THAN NIXON DID. IN GENERAL, THE COMMENTARIES DISAGREE WITH U.S. MEDIA ANALYSIS THAT THE TRANSITION SIGNIFIES THE STRENGTH OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM AND ASSERT THAT ON THE CONTRARY THE 18-MONTH-LONG CRISIS ILLUSTRATED THE SYSTEM'S

INABILITY TO EFFICIENTLY COPE WITH ITS MOST IMPORTANT
PROBLEMS.
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